

Carnivorous Plant Tour of South America Part Two: Exploring the Temperate South, and the Journey Back.

By Randy Lamb
4304 E. Pender St.
Burnaby, BC, Canada V5C 2M6

Argentina

After travelling along coastal and inland Uruguay I went on to Argentina to later investigate its cool beckoning south. In Buenos Aires I spent a week enjoying the market places, coffee houses and "Parrilla" beef houses in the older parts of town. A quick visit to the Jardín Botánico did not turn up any PC [plantas carnívoras] but it was still quite an enjoyable afternoon.

Soon enough I was on a flight to the far southern reaches of the continent, to the world's most southerly city, Ushuaia. Located on the Argentinian side of "Tierra del Fuego" and overlooking the Beagle Channel, Ushuaia receives a cool coastal temperate climate. The weather, people's attire, and the local flora all made me a little homesick. My Español had improved immeasurably by this time so I had few problems locating information at the Parque Nacional and Forestry offices along with directions to the local plantas carnívoras. I received several hot tips on turbales [*Sphagnum* bogs] which were known to contain *Drosera uniflora* and *Pinguicula antarctica*.

In "Tierra del Fuego Parque Nacional" I eventually found myself on an elevated boardwalk at Laguna Negra, over its lakeside *Sphagnum* bog. A large information sign there points out extensive colonies of *D. uniflora*. I had just missed their flowering by a few weeks judging by the large single green seed capsule held above each mature plant. The flat thick basal rosettes of *D. uniflora*, along with their singly-borne style of flowering, seemed very unusual and primitive compared to other species of *Drosera*. The large glistening colonies of sundews spread over the *Sphagnum* mats was an impressive sight to behold.

I spent a week in Ushuaia going on long hikes every day to investigate its many glaciers, Beech forests and *Sphagnum* bogs but I found no more PC. At the town's local library I found reference books on the local flora and fauna, including maps covering the areas of Chile and Argentina that I would be travelling into during the next several weeks. I also found detailed descriptions of the PC species I sought along with habitat data, distribution ranges and altitudes of documented sites. On my final day while waiting for my flight north to Patagonia I was treated to a light snowfall which made that particular southern adventure complete.

Once arrived in the Rio Gallegos airport I immediately caught a bus inland to Calafate, located on Lago Argentina near the "Los Glaciares" national park. The boat tour along the park's spectacular Moreno glacier allows you to cruise between icebergs, watch new ones being calved and ride the large waves and swells that result. The local park naturalist knew of no PC in the area but had a few stories about sundews at the Fitzroy area to the immediate north. On my way out of the park office I picked up an information pamphlet to read and practice my Spanish with on the long bus ride back to the coast. In accordance with Murphy's Law, several hundred kilometres and several hours later I discovered information in the brochure describing *P. antarctica* in the park! C'est la vie!

Back along the coast I went north visiting the penguin, sea lion and sea elephant colonies as I went. These areas were of the typical dry patagonian grass and scrublands that exist on the eastern side of the Andes mountains. Later I travelled inland to



Photo #12



Photo #13. *D. uniflora* at Tierra del Fuego, Argentina.

Argentina 12 & 13—*D. uniflora* at Tierra del Fuego, Argentina.

Esquel and then Bariloche. The naturalists at “Los Alerces” National Park knew of local butterworts by the Torre Cillas Glacier above Lago Menendez but they were only boat or horse accessible.

In a Bariloche book store I found a local flora book, Flora de Puerto Blest, and it listed *P. chilensis* as growing in a National Park across Lago Nahuel Huapi. Private boat rentals to go there were very expensive for gringos so I decided to leave my PC searches for the western side of the Andes, in Chile.

Chile

Seeing Chile’s south as I travelled through the Lake District was breathtakingly beautiful with endless mountains, rivers, lakes and forests. As you pass over the Andes mountains you can see the difference that the moister climate on the west makes as the vegetation gradually

becomes greener and more lush. My bus trip ended in the coastal fishing town of Puerto Montt, on the Pacific Ocean. When I wasn’t dining on seafood, I was over at the Forestry office. Señor José Mercado, the “Técnico Forestal de Javier”, kindly took the



P. antarctica, Chiloé Island, Chile.

time to make a list of potential national parks and locations that I should visit to find *Sphagnum* bogs and carnivorous plants.

My first field outing took me on a trip to Chiloé Island to the south. The resident naturalist at the "Chiloé Parque Nacional" headquarters was away on duties when I arrived but there were posters on the wall showing butterworts and sundews growing side by side! Having only several hours before the daily bus left I quickly headed out on the trails through the *Sphagnum* bogs and forests. Sundews were nowhere to be found, but in one bog that bordered a farmer's cow pasture I found waves of tiny yellow red-veined flowers. After slogging barefoot through the deep cow-churned peaty muck, I found that the flowers I had spotted belonged to a species of terrestrial bladderwort that appeared similar in form and habit to a small *U. intermedia*. Once I had finished taking photos and cleaning my feet, the time re-

maining made it clear that I had to jog back to the village in order to catch the bus before it left. On the way back, disappointed at not finding sundews or butterworts, I spotted a flash of green in the path's ditch. The green colour turned out to belong to a colony of butterworts! While catching my breath I took a couple of photos before



these plants were within the distribution range of *P. chilensis*, the low elevation and coastal occurrence made it clear that the plants were indeed *P. antarctica* !

North of Puerto Montt I travelled to the virgin temperate rain forests at "Agua Caliente" national park where several turberas [*Sphagnum* bogs] were located. The early evening drizzle dampened my spirits little as I soaked in the hot spring pools located on the lower slopes of the Antillanca Volcano; my tent was another matter during the cold wet night though. An hour before sunrise I started the ten kilometres hike up to the bog lake I had been given directions to. My determination to find sundews dwindled as the rains started again while I was at the lake. All that was to be found was an aquatic bladderwort, similar to *U. minor* in size and form, which I took a herbarium sample of and described later to the park rangers.

Central Chile turned up no other carnivorous plants. I must add however, that the vineyards near Santiago are a great place to look for PC, especially in the wine tasting rooms.

Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Columbia

Unfortunately, at this point in my journey there was hardly any time left for PC hunts. It was now necessary to concentrate on my return journey.

From Santiago I flew north to Arica where I changed planes to go on to Bolivia. The flight to La Paz was incredible, starting at sea level and crossing the Andes mountains to land on the altiplano at nearly four thousand metres in elevation. I kept a constant look out for PC while exploring the countryside, including the 5,200 metre Chacaltaya Glacier, but most of the areas were too high in elevation.

From Bolivia my travels took me into Peru where I travelled around Lake Titicaca, then continued by train into the Inca Valleys and Cusco. While climbing the peak over Machu Pichu I found *Sphagnum* beds hanging on the steep cliff sides but no PC could be found. There were however many different varieties of orchids in bloom at these Inca ruins in early March.

I saw vast expanses of beautiful countryside and potential PC habitats while bussing across Ecuador but I had little time to check them out properly. Soon I was off on a flight from Quito, Ecuador to Bogotá, Columbia for a short stopover. From there I would later return to Caracas, Venezuela by plane.

Venezuela

Once back in Caracas I set out to track down the PC collections I had heard and read about. A trip to the local University's Botany department found that the professor I wanted to see was in the Gran Sabana doing work. The secretary told me that there were no carnivorous plants at the university but I should try the nearby botanical gardens which had some. The people at the botanical gardens told me that their person was also in the field, that they had no PC either, and I should try the "Parque del Este". As it turned out, and as was expected, the park also had no PC and they suggested trying the university and the botanical gardens. Somehow none of the day's events were of any surprise to me at that point so I shrugged my shoulders and spent the rest of the week playing tourist, shopping, and relaxing. It was time to go home.

Want Ad

Lee's Botanical Gardens (P.O. Box 669; LaBelle FL 33935; USA):

Lost a few *Nepenthes* in Hurricane Andrew. BT: *N. ampullaria* red speckled; *N. ecastoma*, *N. X "rafflesiana X bicalcarata"*, *N. X tsangoya*. *N. X coccinea*, *N. X dormanniana*, *N. X elaborative koto*, *N. X mizuho*, *N. X hyogo*.